Brain imaging working group summaries for the european joint programme for neurodegenerative disease research

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Harmonization of procedures is key in all fields of biomedicine. In the clinic, the standardization of methods and techniques makes it possible to offer consistent and reliable care across health care delivery centers of a country and to deliver a similar level of quality care to all patients irrespective of geographic location. In research, it allows for the collection of large national and supranational databases that can be effectively used to address a much larger set of scientific questions and with much greater efficiency and precision.

In the dementia field, magnetic resonance imaging and positron emission tomography are neuroimaging tools heavily used for diagnosis, but their acquisition, processing, and reporting are still significantly heterogeneous across geographic locations and medical specialties [1]. With the aim of promoting imaging harmonization, the EU Joint Programme—Neurodegenerative Disease Research, a multinational funding scheme, launched in 2016 to support 10 working groups organized to study and recommend approaches for harmonization and alignment in brain imaging methods for neurodegeneration [2], encompassing traditional and innovative magnetic resonance imaging techniques and technologies, as well as traditional and innovative positron emission tomography molecular tracers for Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, and neurodegenerative diseases in general. Some of the working groups capitalized on existing consortia. Table 1 lists the 10 project titles and coordinators.

The working groups organized one or more in-person workshops over a period of 12 months to identify gaps of...
knowledge in their respective domains, and to draft research agendas. Importantly, the working groups were not tasked with providing answers to these gaps of knowledge, but with identifying and spelling them out as clearly and neatly as possible for them to be amenable to investigation in future research programs. In the EU Joint Programme—Neurodegenerative Disease Research initiative funding scheme, this is a common approach, and the guidance from these working groups will be considered in developing future calls for research grant programs, contingent on the availability of funds from the participating countries.

The conclusions of the working groups are summarized in the series of articles within this issue of Alzheimer’s & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring. While not claiming to be an exhaustive checklist, we believe that this collection of reports will provide a useful reference for funding agencies and scientists worldwide.

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References
